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## ROSCOMMON: HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

ROSCOMMON is of interest to the student of English literature as being one of the pioneers in the so-called classical school of English poetry. That he stood high as a poet in his generation can hardly be doubted by one who puts implicit faith in the testimony of his contemporaries and reads with sublime credulity the laudatory verses addressed to him; but that his generation was prone to pay extravagant homage to genius, if perchance it found lodgment in the brain of a nobleman, is also as equally incontestible. It has been a tolerably prevalent custom among critics in those countries where royalty flourishes not to subject the life of a nobleman to severest trial, but to review it with a large charity. It is therefore difficult to ascertain precisely just how high his brother poets ranked Roscommon in the sober but unexpressed judgments of their closets.

The records available in constructing a full biography are meager and a bit contradictory. The earliest manuscript account of the poet is preserved in the university library at Cambridge, and is known as MS. Baker, xxxvi., 27. It is written by Dr. Knightly Chetwode (or Chetwood), who was a contemporary and friend of the poet. This manuscript is referred to by Peter Cunningham, the editor of Murray's new edition of Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" (vol. I, page 204, note); but it is evident that he had not seen it. This manuscript (or a part of it, for much of it is scarcely intelligible, owing to omissions) was published for the first time in December, 1855, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, third series. In addition to this source we have the life of Roscommon by Fenton in his "Observations on Some of Edmund Wal-

ler's Poems," prefixed to the edition of the poems in 1729. Fenton had opportunity of gathering his facts fresh, and in his life of the poet Dr. Johnson relies almost wholly on Fenton. There are a great many biographical sketches of the poet; but with one exception no improvement on Fenton can be found, and all but one incorporate Fenton's errors. The best sketch by far, and the one that is freest from error, is that in the "Dictionary of National Biography."

Wentworth Dillon, fourth Earl of Roscommon, was born in Ireland about 1633. His father was Sir James Dillon; and though bred a Roman Catholic, he was a Protestant at his son's birth. The poet's mother was Elizabeth, third and youngest daughter of Sir William Wentworth, of Wentworth Woodhouse, Yorkshire, and sister to the great Earl of Strafford. The poet was born, according to Fenton, during the lieutenancy of Strafford in Ireland, and was taken under the guardianship of that earl, who gave him the surname of his own family. "In that kingdom," says Fenton, "he passed the first years of his infancy; but his father having been converted by Archbishop Ussher from the communion of the Church of Rome, the Earl of Strafford apprehending his family would be exposed to the most furious effects of religious revenge, at the beginning of the Irish rebellion sent his godson into England and placed him at his own seat in Yorkshire, under the tuition of Dr. Hall, a person of eminent learning and piety." But who this Dr. Hall was, other than this mention of him by Fenton, seems difficult to determine. Dr. Johnson thinks it could not have been the famous Bishop Hall, as he was then over eighty years old. A luminous article in the *Dublin University Magazine* (vol. 88, page 601) for the year 1875, takes the position that it was Bishop Hall.

Young Dillon's chief study was Latin, which, it is said, he learned to write with classical elegance and purity and often preferred for a medium of correspondence with those persons who could "support the commerce." But though he was master of Latin for use as a vehicle of thought, he never had a memory for retaining any of the common grammatical rules.

Some of the poet's biographers and eulogists would have us believe he was a remarkably precocious youth and ripened into a great scholar. That the former statement is true appears in a manner likely; the latter we may be pardoned for doubting. According to Dr. Chetwood, he wrote poems on religious subjects at the age of thirteen, which, although remarkable for his years, were not considered sufficiently interesting for publication.

About eight years after the poet's birth the cloud began to gather over England which transformed her merry fields into a veritable aceldama, and finally fell in torrents upon the head of Strafford and resulted in his impeachment. By the advice of Ussher, Roscommon was sent to complete his education at Caen, in Normandy, where the Protestants had founded a university. Here he was under the tutelage of that deservedly eminent Samuel Bochart. At this time Bochart was easily among the first of the continental scholars in learning and intellectual vigor. To all readers of Church history his famous debate with the Jesuit Francis du Veron is well known. That Roscommon must have widened his studies and devoted himself less exclusively to literature we may safely infer from the reputation of Bochart, his master, and from the subsequent demonstration of the poet's taste. Bochart was famous not only as a linguist of considerable powers, but also as an Orientalist and antiquarian. Roscommon's literary activity came late in life, and as a kind of dignified repose from his early dissolute career. After some years spent at Caen he went to travel with a friend, Lord Cavendish, afterwards the Duke of Devonshire, in France, Germany, and Italy. What seemed to attract him most in Italy were the remains of antiquity and the study of numismatics. Here, then, is some evidence worth considering that he must have been less a student of literature than of other things.

He seems by nature to have had an aptitude for acquiring languages. Not only did he learn Latin with apparent ease, but during his residence in France he learned to speak that tongue with purity. While sojourning at Rome he acquired

the Italian language with such accuracy of accent and purity of idiom that the taunt of the Hebrew maid to Peter, "Thy speech betrayeth thee," could never have been flung at our lord Roscommon. He was in fact frequently mistaken for a native.

His father died at Limerick, October, 1649, from the effects of a fall downstairs. This was during Dillon's academical residence in Normandy. In his curious book of "Miscellanies," John Aubrey relates the following, anent a supposed preternatural intelligence of his death communicated to the son: "The lord Roscommon, being a boy of ten years of age, at Caen, in Normandy, one day was (as it were) made extravagant in playing, leaping, getting over the table boards, etc. He was wont to be sober enough: they said, 'God grant this bodes no ill luck to him!' In the heat of this extravagant fit he cries out: 'My father is dead!' A fortnight after, news came from Ireland that his father was dead. This account I had from Mr. Knolles, who was his governor and then with him, since secretary to the Earl of Strafford, and I have heard his lordship's relations confirm the same." Dr. Johnson quotes this passage in his "Life of Roscommon," and seems very much perplexed as to how to treat it. He admits that his age is little inclined to favor any such account, and adds that the name of Aubrey would not much recommend it. But he thinks it ought to be mentioned, because there cannot be found better evidence for a fact than this. "If we stay to examine this fact," says the learned Doctor, "we shall see difficulties on both sides." He then proceeds to examine the case under the law of evidence, and cannot come to any positive conclusion. When we remember the Doctor's credulity on the subject of ghosts and such like, we are not surprised that he inclined to believe this a case of real presentiment. According to Boswell, Dr. Johnson did not believe in the Cock Lane ghost, but was sufficiently credulous on the subject of ghosts in general to sit up a good part of the night watching for the aforesaid Cock Lane ghost. If Malone's estimate of Aubrey be true, he is a witness whose veracity has never been impeached; and,

though fanatical on the subjects of chemistry and ghosts, his testimony is worthy of attention. But, granting the account be true, still the mystery may be clarified by admitting the element of mere coincidence. We may still believe the facts as reported by Aubrey without feeling constrained to rest in his conclusions.

The state of affairs in both England and Ireland at this time was such that any one absent from either country did not care to come back. Accordingly, Roscommon remained abroad until after the Restoration. When he returned to England he was received with great favor at the court of Charles, and soon afterwards was made, through the influence of the Duke of York, captain of a band of gentlemen pensioners. By an act of Parliament all the honors, castles, lordships, lands, etc., whereof his great-grandfather, grandfather, or father was in possession on October 23, 1641, were restored to him. By virtue of this statute he became seized of several estates in the counties of Meath, Westmeath, Kings, Mayo, Galway, Sligo, Roscommon, and Tipperary.

The gayeties and frivolities of the court of that king,

"Who never said a foolish thing,  
And never did a wise one,"

in which the monarch himself so freely indulged, setting the fashion of horse racing by presenting the first "royal cup," and building a palace at Newmarket, entrapped the Earl into the vices of gambling. Such was the widespread reaction against the buckram morality of the age of regnant puritanism, and the general laxity of morals and boldness of vice therefrom resulting, that the current proved too strong for the Earl to stem, if indeed he cared to. He very soon contracted a passion for gaming which led him into many of the concomitant vices, in which not only did his modest fortune suffer from the heavy draughts made upon it, but the Earl was embroiled in many quarrels which not unfrequently led to duels. He, however, seems to have very plainly seen the folly of gambling, for on one occasion he took five hundred broad pieces to one of his friends and desired him to expend

it for books or use it for charity. "For," said he, "I shall otherwise certainly play it away." The money was kept for some time, but returned, and, when he refused it, was left at his house. A few days afterwards the Earl told his friend that he was accountable not only for the five hundred broad pieces, but for another sum nearly as great which he had lost before at a basset table in Covent Garden.

At length, on the occasion of a dispute arising between himself and the Lord Privy Seal about some of his estates in Ireland, he was compelled to return to his native country. Thus say Fenton and those following him. There is, however, possibly another reason, if indeed that just mentioned be one. In the collection of state papers there is a letter of the date June 26, 1661, written by Capt. Valentine Jowles to the navy commissioners, in which he says Lord Roscommon was sent for by the lords justices of Ireland, as he was needed at their councils. He took his seat in the Irish Parliament by proxy July 10, 1661. Whatever may have been the reasons of his visit to Ireland, we see him in Dublin the following October, where he was made captain in the Guards by Ormonde.

During his residence in Ireland Roscommon apparently plunged into politics. He had many disputes in council and Parliament with the Lord Privy Seal, then lord lieutenant, who at the time enjoyed the reputation of being one of the best speakers in the kingdom. That the Earl was generally victorious in these disputes is not slight evidence that he had no mean powers of oratory, or at least was an expert dialectician. Speaking of the Earl's life in Ireland, the Marquis of Halifax pays him this compliment: "The Earl was one of the best orators and most capable of business, too, if he would attend to it, in the three kingdoms." The Marquis's protasis in this encomium suggests that the Earl's dissolute life which he led in England, and the passion for gaming which he developed at the court of Charles, had not been left behind.

We know but little of his life in Dublin. Thanks to Fenton, we catch one glimpse of him there. Whether the inci-

dent is true or fictitious it is not easy to ascertain. But it is here given because it illustrates not only the Earl's gaming propensity but also his generosity and gratitude. There are no grounds for rejecting it, and it seems to have the stamp of truth:

As he returned to his lodging from a gaming table, he was attacked in the dark by three ruffians, who were employed to assassinate him. The Earl defended himself with so much resolution that he disabled one of the aggressors, whilst a gentleman accidentally passing that way interposed and disarmed another; the third secured himself by flight. This generous assistant was a disbanded officer, of good family and fair reputation; who, by what we call the partiality of fortune, to avoid censuring the iniquities of the times, wanted even a plain suit of clothes to make a decent appearance at the castle. But his lordship on this occasion, presenting him to the Duke of Ormonde, with great importunity prevailed with his grace that he might resign his post of captain of the Guards to his friend, which for about three years the gentleman enjoyed; and upon his death the Duke returned the commission to his generous benefactor.

The immediate business which occasioned the Earl's visit to Ireland finished, he returned to England, drawn thither by the attractions of the court and friends. When he arrived in England again it was not to be in his old rôle. He seems not to have returned to his former haunts of vice, but to have changed his manner of living. At this period, in his thirtieth year, his literary life may be reckoned to begin.

On his return to England he was made master of the horse to the Duchess of York; and soon afterwards married the Lady Frances, eldest daughter of Richard, Earl of Burlington, and formerly wife of Col. Courtney. Now that the business of estates was settled, the proverbial wild oats of youth sown, and the affairs of the heart comfortably arranged and tranquilized in the sunlight of a fair lady's love, our lord Roscommon turns his face toward Parnassus and worships in a fane dedicated to the Muses. Literature was his occasional employment for the subsequent years of his life. During his stay at Caen, that resort of geniuses, he had become acquainted with a literary academy in which Bochart was a conspicuous member, and in imitation of this institution he sought to form one in England. In this literary project he had associated with him the Marquis of Hali-



fax (who undertook the translation of Tacitus), Lord Maitland (who here began his translation of Virgil), the Earl of Dorset, Lord Cavendish, Col. Finch, Sir Charles Scarborough, Dryden, and others. The last five, however, were only occasional members. On September 28, 1680, the Duchess of York and the Princess Anne visited Cambridge, and on the occasion of the royal visit that university conferred upon Roscommon the honorary degree of LL.D. Three years afterwards Oxford conferred upon him the degree of D.C.L.

In 1674 the Earl was married to his second wife. She was Isabella, daughter of Matthew, second son of Sir Matthew Boynton, bart., of Baruston, Yorkshire. She survived him.

Concerning the last years of his life there is no little confusion among his biographers. Some put his death in 1684, while others as late as 1688. A writer in the *Dublin University Magazine* (vol. 88, 1875), writing under the name of "Lancashire Witch," favors the latter date as the proper one. Fenton relates that after the accession of James II. the Earl, foreseeing the disturbances likely to arise on account of religion, resolved to retire to Rome, explaining this action by the enigmatic metaphor: "It is better to sit next the chimney when the chamber smokes." Johnson, following Fenton places his death after the accession of James II. Several biographical dictionaries of later time incline to a later date rather than an earlier. That they are guilty of an anachronism is apparent. Luttrell, in his journal, January 16, 1684-85, notes "the Earl of Roscommon was lately dead." If Luttrell's entry be accurate, then we have a tolerably definite date. According to the "Dictionary of National Biography," the Earl preceded James II. to the grave by three weeks.

But Fenton says the Earl did not reach Rome, and the "Lancashire Witch" says he died *en route*. They both agree on the cause of his death: that he was seized with gout and, becoming impatient of pain, employed a French charlatan, who so unskillfully treated the distemper that he drove the complaint into his bowels, from which he died.

A few days before his death he requested a clergyman

friend, most likely Dr. Chetwood, to preach him a sermon at St. James Chapel. His attendants warned him not to go, but he replied that he, like Charles V., would go and hear his own funeral sermon. Returning home, he said he was going out of the world, and remarked to the preacher that he had not left one paper perpetuating their friendship. Thereupon, in memory of that friendship, which was now about to be suspended, he wrote what Dr. Chetwood calls "an excellent divine poem." It was not finished, however, as his physicians interposed. The fragments of this poem were delivered to Queen Mary by Chetwood. These have been published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (new series, vol. xlv., page 604), and apparently they have never been published elsewhere. As I have had some trouble in finding them, and as they are not found in any collection of his works, I shall quote them:

Thou dear instructor of my mind,  
 Profound, judicious, and severely kind;  
 Tell me (for what does not my . . . know?)  
 Whence all our outward ills and inward mischiefs grow.

There follows a handsome description of the regularity of the inanimate creation:

Whilst all things here beneath and all above,  
 In circular successive order move;  
 A constant method everywhere we find  
 Except in wretched man's perverted mind:  
 We plead our youth when you accuse our rage,  
 And yet usurp the laziness of age.  
 Still, much the better part of life is run  
 Before the race of virtue is begun.  
 Are we the masters or the slaves of things,  
 Poor lunatics or sublunary kings?

Afterwards there is a noble description of the deluge, when

Death with commission preyed upon mankind.

The moment in which the Earl expired he uttered, in a voice that expressed the most intense fervor of devotion, two lines of his own version of the *Dies Irae*:

My God, my Father, and my Friend,  
 Do not forsake me at my end!

He was borne with great funeral pomp to Westminster Abbey, and buried "near ye schrine stairs" on January 21, 1684-85. There were about one hundred and twenty coaches-and-six in attendance; and an epitaph in Latin was prepared; but as there was no money forthcoming, the proposed monument was not erected. Fenton modestly says: "His friends seem to have thought his own writings a more durable monument than any they could erect to his memory." But Chetwood seems to have viewed the dereliction less calmly. He observes, in speaking of the widow's indifference to erecting a fit monument: "Not dew in summer dries up faster than widows' tears when they are left wealthy." The Earl leaving no children, the title devolved to his uncle.

In person the Earl very much resembled Strafford, whose picture Chetwood considered more like Roscommon than the portrait of the poet prefixed to his "Remains."

A POET who has been the subject of as many kindly praises as Roscommon, and from such men as Pope, Addison, Marquis d' Argens, and others, is not unworthy of attention. For, however much Dryden and men of his day may have said in the spirit of sycophancy, we cannot attribute a like motive to the men who came later. Pope, who satirized nearly everybody and everything, reserved his kindest words for Roscommon. In his "Essay on Criticism," in which he unsparingly pours out vials of vitriol upon the heads of nearly every one that passes before his view, when Roscommon is marshaled by, he changes his tone, and in lieu of caustic lines turns to use such as these:

Such was Roscommon not more learned than good,  
With manners generous as his noble blood;  
To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,  
And every author's merit but his own.

It is hard to conceive of more unstinted praise. In a few words his moral character, critical taste, learning, generosity, refinement, nobility, and weakness are brought out in bold relief, and yet shaded with the delicacy of kindliness.

Joseph Addison, in his essay on the English poets, refers to him in this way:

Nor must Roscommon pass neglected by,  
That makes even rules, a noble poetry;  
Rules whose deep sense and heavenly numbers show  
The best of critics and of poets too.

The Marquis d'Argens in "*Lettres Juives*," speaking of the growth of poetry in England, attributes its condition to the fact that men of the first quality did not disdain to become followers of the Muses, and instances Roscommon. Creech, the translator of Horace; Lord Lansdowne, who wrote an "*Essay on Unnatural Flights in Poetry*;" Trapp, in his preface to Virgil; and Mrs. Katharine Philips—all bear witness to his abilities as a poet and scholar. Fenton speaks of him as a man whose mind was richly furnished with all the ornaments of learning, unaffectedly disposed in the most regular and elegant order. "His imagination," continues the same writer, "might have probably been more fruitful and sprightly if his judgment had been less severe. But that severity (delivered in a masculine, clear, succinct style) contributed to make him so eminent in the didactical manner, that no man with justice can affirm that he was ever equaled by any of our nation, without confessing at the same time that he is inferior to none." While we perhaps cannot agree with this critic in lauding Roscommon so high, the quotation is of interest as showing the estimate in which the Earl was held.

After reading these words of Fenton and then turning to the poet's works, we are disappointed at finding so rich a mine so poorly worked. For if Fenton's account of the affluence of his mind be true, the poet died without ever giving a very great evidence of the wealth that lay locked in his intellect, as rich ore is often left in the earth. His entire collection of original poems comprise only ten pieces and one fragment, and but one of these of any very considerable length.

His works were published, together with those of Duke, in an octavo volume in 1717. The editor, whoever he was, professed to have taken great care to procure and insert all

his lordship's poems that are truly genuine. In this collection are two poems that subsequent critics have denied to Roscommon; one "The Prospect of Death," being claimed for Mr. John Pomfret by the author of an account of that poet, prefixed to his "Remains," who asserts that "The Prospect of Death" was written many years after Roscommon's death. The other poem declared spurious is the paraphrase of the prayer of Jeremy, which, it is claimed, was written by a gentleman named Southcourt, living in 1724. These two poems are excluded from the collection of Roscommon's poems in Chalmers's English Poets.

It is often asserted by critics that in many cases what a man has left behind in ink is no just standard of measurements of his wealth of mind. Critics generally believe Dr. Johnson was much greater than his writings would lead us to conclude; and it was remarked with eminent propriety of the learned Dr. Robert Hall that his literary remains are but a mean standard of his intellectual vigor. It is evident, then, that Roscommon must have evinced intellectual culture much beyond that we would infer from his poems, though these are by no means of the lowest order. There are many probable conjectures as to why he left so little to the treasury of English verse. Doubtless had he been dependent upon his pen it would have been more prolific. But probably the times also had an influence. It was a period of unrest, of transformation on the verge of a revolution, and many of the poets who had written much often found to their discomfort that they had written too much. The adventures of the poets of this time are well known. Milton, Davenant, and Waller passed through many vicissitudes; Milton saving Davenant from destruction during the period of the Commonwealth; Davenant at the restoration of monarchy returning the favor to Milton.

In reviewing, then, the poetry of Roscommon our field is small. It requires but little reading to run through his gamut. But in that little we are struck by the variety and widely dispersed nature of subjects, which go from verses on the death of a lady's lapdog to the sublime height of the

Last Judgment. While his themes are varied and range over a broad field, his tone is one. He writes in the same finished and elegant style when bemoaning the untimely death of a canine as when discoursing on the horrors of the great day of wrath.

A poet whose lyre never struck chords responsive in the human heart; who never sang madrigals of love, and never sympathized with the loves and sorrows of the common folk; who never communed with nature and never courted the sylvan nymphs—can hardly be expected to reach any great height on Parnassus. All this Roscommon lacks. We look in vain over his lines for descriptions of natural objects or for pastoral love lyrics.

The characteristics by which Roscommon intended to distinguish his writings are accuracy and dignity. In all his pieces he endeavors to be serious, whether his theme be momentous or trivial. We do not find any airy and light pieces, although we catch a hint of the possibility of such a power in his political verses. Gallantry, that attentive reverence for female excellence, so prolific a mother of our best lyrics, seems an unknown subject to the Earl, the nearest approach he makes to it being his poem “To a Young Lady Who Sung Finely and Was Afraid of a Cold,” where, however, he allows hyperbole to run almost into burlesque. The delicacy and accuracy which he so sedulously cultivated restrain him to a certain nicety and caution even when he writes upon the slightest matter. He has therefore, in the few poems left us, nothing treated in a nonchalant manner, and but few errors in his versification. What a critic says of Waller may with equal truth be applied to Roscommon: “He seems always to do his best, though his subjects are often unworthy of his pen.”

“Genius now and then produces a lucky trifle. We still read the ‘Dove’ of Anacreon, and the ‘Sparrow’ of Catullus; and a writer naturally pleases himself with a performance which owes nothing to the subject. But compositions merely pretty have the fate of other pretty things, and are quitted in time for something useful; they are flowers, fragrant and

fair, but of short duration, as they are blossoms to be valued only as they foretell fruits." So says Dr. Johnson in speaking of a certain English poet. Such blossoms are always welcomed in poetry, interspersed with the more enduring and nourishing mental pabulum. Among the shocks of Roscommon's garnered grain we find no such pleasing garnishment. We grow wearied with his precise and stilted verses, and we wish that he would but nod that the monotony might be relieved. It happened to Roscommon that his success was in great disproportion to the amount he produced, although there may be due proportion of success to labor expended.

The public has generally declared a very large dividend of praise upon "The Essay on Translated Verse." Though feeble in thought, it has a certain distinction in our literature as being the first definite enunciation of the principles of poetic diction of our Augustan age. Indeed it is not unworthy of a much greater poet. But, while generally good, the "Essay" is not wholly without its blemishes. Dr. Johnson observes that the story of the quack, which he thinks is borrowed from Boileau, is not worthy the borrowing. Further it seems that his introduction of a long paragraph of blank verse at the close is somewhat licentious. This was not tagged on in the first edition, but added subsequently.

Regarding the subject-matter, Dr. Johnson is inclined to disparage the "Essay" as not embodying any rules but those any man by his own reflection would have discovered. Dryden, on the other hand, speaks of it in purple adjectives, and says his highest ambition is to furnish examples for the rules. The Earl's extravagant praise of Virgil, and lack of appreciation of Homer, have raised up in later times many malcontents. I quote two characteristic and well-known passages:

Hail, mighty Maro! May that sacred name  
Kindle my breast with thy celestial flame;  
Sublime ideas and apt words infuse;  
The Muse instruct my voice, and thou inspire the Muse.

And of Homer:

For who without a qualm, hath ever look'd  
On holy garbage, though by Homer cook'd?  
Whose railing heroes and whose wounded gods  
Make some suspect he snores, as well as nods.

There are many couplets from the "Essay" that have become proverbs in the language, and remind us not a little of Pope. Instance:

Yet be not blindly guided by the throng;  
The multitude is always in the wrong.

And this:

Then, seek a poet who your way does bend,  
And choose an author as you choose a friend.

Immodest words admit of no defense:  
For want of modesty is want of sense.

We occasionally find some really strong figures. Here is one that strikes by its vigor and aptness:

These nervous, bold; those languid and remiss;  
There cold salutes, but here a lover's kiss.

The French critics and devotees of French poetry would hardly admit the Earl's estimate of their poetry to be correct. It is, however, more a praise of English authors than a censure of French verse:

Vain are our neighbors' hopes and vain their cares;  
The fault is more their language's than theirs:  
'Tis courtly, florid, and abounds in words  
Of softer sound than ours perhaps affords.  
But who did ever in French authors see  
The comprehensive English energy?  
The weighty bullion of one sterling line,  
Drawn to French wire, would through whole pages shine.

His translation of Horace's "Art of Poetry" was finished in 1680. It has received not less praise than it deserves. Turning from Horace's lines to Roscommon's translation, we are reminded of one of the Earl's own lines:

. . . shows the stuff, but not the workman's skill.

Blank verse left merely to its numbers affects the ear or the mind but weakly; it needs the support of bold figures and striking images. A poem as frigidly didactic and without



rhyme as the translation is has little to recommend it; while, on the contrary, it is so near to prose that the reader scorns it for pretending to be verse. It may be the poor translation he made here taught him many wise generalizations and precepts which he four years afterwards embodied in his "Essay." It requires considerable self-command to drag through it.

The paraphrase of the one hundred and forty-eighth Psalm is deserving of special mention as being nearer lyrical than any of the others, and having elements of strength and beauty. It is a doxology, and opens:

O azure vaults! O crystal sky!  
The world's transparent canopy;  
Break your long silence and let mortals know  
With what contempt you look on things below.

Here is a strong passage, though the last line has an unpleasant harshness about it:

Great eye of all, whose glorious ray  
Rules the bright empire of the day!  
O praise his name, without whose purer light  
Thou hadst been hid in an abyss of night.

Certain paraphrases are clever, and withal poetic. Instance this description of the birds:

Idle musicians of the spring,  
Whose only care's to love and sing:  
Fly through the world, and let your trembling throat  
Praise your Creator with the sweetest note.

The poet's strong monarchical principles and predilections are reflected in this stanza:

Majestic monarchs, mortal gods  
Whose power has here no periods;  
May all attempts against your vows be vain!  
But still remember by whose power you reign.

In the song "To a Young Lady Who Sung Finely and Was Afraid of a Cold" there is pleasing versification and classic diction, but the source of its weakness has already been pointed out. The Earl was not a master of flattery if this be a fair specimen.

"The Dream" is a clever piece containing several phrases

of poetic value, and the poet's refuting the common comparison of sleep to death is gracefully done.

"The Ghost of the House of Commons" and "Ross's Ghost," two political pieces, are sprightly verses, and when they were written must have been very effective and popular.

Among his smaller translations the "Sixth Eclogue" of Virgil and the "Dies Irae" are well translated, though his best lines in the latter are borrowed from Dryden. The two odes of Horace are made with great freedom, and lack the elegance and vigor of the original. Of the scene of Guarini and the prologue to Corneille's "Pompey," Mrs. Katharine Philips, in her letters to Sir Charles Cotterell, has given the history.

"Lord Roscommon," says she, "is certainly one of the most popular young noblemen in Ireland. He has paraphrased a Psalm admirably, and a scene of "Pastor Fido" very finely—in some places much better than Sir Richard Fanshawe. This was undertaken merely in compliment to me, who happened to say that it was the best scene in Italian and the worst in English. He was only two hours about it."

When Mrs. Philips was in Ireland some ladies who had seen her translation of "Pompey" resolved to bring it on the stage in Dublin; and to promote their design Lord Roscommon gave them a prologue, and Sir Edward Derrington an epilogue.

The general character of Roscommon's poetry is didactic rather than emotional, elegant and precise rather than sublime and vigorous. He is never gay, but always serious; never falls to the commonplace, but never rises to the heights of sublimity. The type of his poetry is in keeping with his ideals in the art. He is eminently a classicist, and his canons are of course opposed to the general theory of the romantics. His lines impress us as not having gushed warm from the heart, but as having passed by way of the brain and become chilled and discolored in getting through to the light.

The complaint often urged against Waller—that he borrows too many of his sentiments and illustrations from an-

cient mythologies—might be entered against Roscommon. The fact of his intimate acquaintance with classic authors, and his frequent company with them, while sufficient to explain the presence of the fault, can hardly be pleaded in extenuation. The deities which the ancient poets marched so frequently across their pages were realities to them, and carried the weight of illustration they can never bring to moderns, who in theology scorn them, while tolerating them in poetry.

The general estimate of Dr. Johnson on Roscommon's poetry is perhaps true. "Of Roscommon's works," the Doctor says, "the judgment of the public seems to be right. He is elegant, but not great; he never labors after exquisite beauties, and he seldom falls into gross faults. His versification is smooth, but rarely vigorous; his rhymes are remarkably exact. He improved taste if he did not enlarge knowledge, and may be numbered among the benefactors to English literature."

FRAZER HOOD.